

NEW FREEDOM FOR THE BLIND.

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## New Freedom for the Blind

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● *War labor shortages have broken down many of the barriers against the employment of the physically handicapped. Among those gaining new work opportunities are the visually handicapped. They need sound vocational guidance, particularly at this time. The special problems involved are discussed here. See also Occupations, May, 1941, page 585.*

sighted. The use of fixtures, jigs, and mandrills has greatly facilitated the employment of the blind. A blind man working on a jig boring operation finds that time spent by his sighted co-worker looking at his work is just so much time wasted, since the job does not essentially require vision.

A blind man working at gauging at the Remington Arms Company, Inc., at Bridgeport, Connecticut, reached on his fourth day a production amount that usually requires two weeks for new operators to acquire. The company reports that a check made on his output shows that he is consistently maintaining the maximum, and there is no record of his having passed any bad work since he was put on regular production.<sup>2</sup>

The Nunn-Bush Shoe Company of Milwaukee, Wisconsin, state that for nearly a quarter of a century they have used blind persons or persons with deficient sight for inspection work on men's shoes. They have found them more satisfactory than workers with perfect sight. Their fingers are more sensitive, they are able to concentrate better. This type of worker has proved thoroughly satisfactory for this particular job.<sup>2</sup>

The Essex Rubber Company of Trenton, New Jersey, claims that a blind girl has averaged well over the estimated average output for the work on which she is employed. By actual comparison, she is slightly above other employees previously employed on this particular job, and they feel that the inspection done by her is more

TODAY IN OUR defense program the blind<sup>1</sup> are being trained for war industries. They work with the sighted, not on a basis of charity or sympathy but in full competition and at the same wages. They are demonstrating that all placements of blind persons should be made on merit. The records show that with the proper training blind workers surpass the sighted from 10 to 80 per cent in certain hand-skilled operations as blind persons are especially adept at these.

Manual dexterity with all that this ability implies in efficiency of motion has only relatively recently been understood and exploited. Economy of motion has been highly developed in many blind persons as a matter of necessity. They learn to use their fingers as a substitute for eyes.

The desperate labor shortage has given blind workers the opportunity to prove that they can do efficiently many machine operations formerly performed by the

<sup>1</sup> This paper refers to those persons with less than 20/200 vision in the better eye when corrected with glasses. They cannot see at 20 feet what normal eyes see at 200 feet. As a group their visual perception ranges from totally blind and those who can only distinguish light from darkness, to those who can read newspaper headlines but not ordinary print.

<sup>2</sup> *Letters from Sighted Employers of Blind Employees, 1942*, published by National Society for the Blind, Inc., Washington, D. C.

careful and thorough than her predecessor's.

Blind persons working in factories in competition with sighted workers have consistently excelled in speed and accuracy, without a single recorded compensable accident in the United States for forty years. This is an unbeatable safety record. There is no provision in any policy of Workmen's Compensation insurance which interferes with the proper placing of blind persons in industry. Furthermore, there is nothing in any formula for the establishment of premium rates for such insurance that takes account of the age or the physical handicap of any employee.

The question might be raised whether or not a blind person would be able to move around in a factory or an office. Even the sighted generally walk about with a friend, and in a short time the blind worker does also. Generally too much attention and aid are given the blind worker and his sighted comrades have to be taught how much is advisable.

Because of new inventions and technological improvements, the number of occupations is constantly changing. The blind are as able as the sighted to meet these changes and should be encouraged to do so. The possibilities of discovering new careers for highly educated blind persons should be carefully explored and those with enterprise, courage, and intelligence to embark on new ventures should be assisted and encouraged.

Here we are chiefly concerned with the estimated 10 per cent of the blind who are employable in outside industry. Many blind high school graduates are not college material. The vocational counselor should aid these in planning for non-professional work.

Blind boys may be trained in mechanics and machine operations. Girls may be trained in home economics or certain industrial operations. Both boys and girls may be taught office work and become dictaphone operators, telephone operators,

receptionists. As a rule they make excellent typists as most children with defective vision study touch typing, beginning with the third grade. They also study Braille shorthand and can compete with sighted typists. Blind workers are less efficient in small offices where the work is diversified; their efficiency increases with specialization.

Training of the blind should develop both manual dexterity and muscular coordination. Through various tool operations constantly repeated, the student gains ability, skill, and muscular control.

Pre-vocational training is perhaps even more important than vocational training for it can be the basis for consideration of many vocations. Thus if a blind person were trained only as a drill press operator, some time might pass before he could be placed in a job. On the other hand, if he were trained to develop muscular coordination and manual dexterity, it would be merely a matter of a few days before he would be able to perform any one of a number of machine operations.

In order to attain the vocational objective for the blind student, the counselors must always remember that the student does have defective vision. He must realize that blind pupils gain knowledge through hearing and touching and that the concepts given must be shown in those terms. The vocational counselor should recognize the fact that these blind students are trying to adjust themselves to occupations in an increasingly mechanized civilization.

#### WIDER HORIZONS

Traditionally, blind persons have been considered extremely limited in their ability. What schools there were, stressed music and the arts. More practical individuals learned to tune pianos, cane chairs, and weave. The restrictions in their vocational choice and the false assumptions of family and friends, as well as the general public, lulled the blind into a lethargy from which there were few



awakenings. There were exceptions, but for the most part blind persons were made to feel from infancy that their destiny was dark and that at every turn they would meet insurmountable barriers. Inevitably many of them slipped into helplessness. With the turn of the twentieth century and the development of specialization, there came new possibilities for training and placing the blind in useful work.

A vocational counselor should not be afraid to consider a vocational interest of a visually defective person because it happens to be different from the type of work he thought the student would be able to do. The student may achieve great success in this unusual occupation. It is important that the counselor become acquainted with the potentialities of blind persons so that he can better advise them. He must learn that a great many are very capable and some have abilities that far surpass the sighted. He must realize that eventually they will wish to marry and support a family.

The roster of blind persons who have become successful professionally is an impressive one. At present there are about 125 blind lawyers in the United States; two have become United States Senators, Gore of Oklahoma and Shaw of Minnesota. Others have been members of the House of Representatives. There is hardly a state legislature that has not had its blind representative, usually a lawyer. Many blind teachers have rendered yeoman service as Home Teachers, teachers in elementary and high schools, as well as college professors. Other professions are represented by Helen Keller, the author, and Alec Templeton, the pianist. Too numerous to mention are the blind social workers. They include heads of agencies and commissions for the blind. Among the most noted of this group are Robert Irwin, President of the American Foundation for the Blind; and Joseph Clunk, Chief, Department of Services for the Blind, Washington, D. C.

We have been accustomed to thinking

of the blind as a class and have tried to solve their problems and difficulties in other ways than those of the sighted. This concept has been ill founded. The average person with a visual defect is potentially physiologically and psychologically as normal as an average sighted person, and his defect is not necessarily an unsurmountable handicap unless he makes it one.

If the blind student is to make rational plans for his future work and be successful in it he should have the help of a vocational counselor. The student with defective vision should be shown how to overcome difficulties and reach his goal in spite of obstacles.

In the education of its blind school children, New Jersey has an unusually successful set-up. Instead of segregating them in residential schools for the blind, the children, according to their degree of vision,<sup>3</sup> are sent to sight-saving and Braille classes in public schools for the first eight grades. If capable, they attend high school with sighted students and are assigned a tutor-reader by the New Jersey State Commission for the Blind. This reader is a certified secondary school teacher who supplements the work of the classroom teachers by approximately two hours of tutoring and reading every school day. Blind students are thus a part of the public school set-up and are prepared for the competitive life with the sighted during their school days, instead of having this hurdle to jump later.

The vocational counselor has a definite problem in guiding blind students in how to make a livelihood after completing school. Too often these students have been pushed from pillar to post. They have been graduated from high school, many completing the classical course, only to be left undecided as to what they should do next. The fault often lay with the counselor who was not prepared to render the special service required for the sound occupational adjustment of the blind.

<sup>3</sup> 20/70 to total blindness.

# Speed-Up Courses for British Workers

GERALD CARR

British Journalist

■ *Enter actresses, seamstresses, and housewives. Except four months later, welders, electricians, and machine tool operators. That is the record of the Government Training Centers of Great Britain. For an account of this metamorphosis, read this article.*

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WORKERS from 18 to 60 years of age are going to school in Great Britain, where miracles of transformation are performed to fit them for the task of making weapons to win the war. Ex-white-collar workers, domestic help, actresses and chorines, waitresses, dressmakers, musicians, store clerks, and women who have never before done anything but housework, flow into the classrooms and emerge, four months later, trained machine tool operators, electricians, draughtswomen, instrument makers, and welders.

Leading industrialists thought it was impossible to train unskilled women to do the work of engineers in a few months, when the Government Training Centers, as these schools are known, began to operate. They pointed to the years of apprenticeship that a boy must serve before he is fully trained, and laughed at the idea of women being able to do in four months what a boy took five years and more to learn.

But those same industrialists are now eager to have all the women trainees that the Centers can supply. The miracle which seems to short-circuit time has been performed by specialization and the training of teachers.

The last claim that these women trainees would make when they leave a Center is

that they are fully skilled engineers. They do claim, however, and rightly so, that they have been fully trained to do a particular skilled job in a specialized field.

Thus, one can do electric welding and another oxy-acetylene welding; yet another knows how to operate a center lathe while a comrade has specialized on milling—all having learned the fundamentals of a particular craft and receiving pay while learning.

One of the secrets of how they gain these specific skills in such a short period is to be found in another school—a teaching college for teachers. All the teachers at the Centers are master craftsmen who have spent most of their lives in industry, but the fact that men know how to do a technical job does not necessarily mean that they can impart their knowledge to others. All teachers, therefore, go first to a college supervised by a University professor as a teacher, where they learn how to pass on the concentrated fruits of their years of practical experience.

The Training Centers themselves seem more like factories than schools at first sight, except for the little groups of a dozen or so pupils who may be grouped around an instructor. In fact, they are factories; for a pupil is not only ready to go into industry after four months' training, but even before that time she has been making munitions of war.

If she has successfully passed the examinations at the end of the eighth and twelfth weeks of training, thereby winning an increase in pay, she will probably be producing, in the last month, aircraft parts which must pass the most rigorous tests applied by inspectors of the Ministry of Aircraft Production. And she will

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